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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 1943

SUBJECT: "FOODS WITH LESS SPACE AND LESS WASTE." Information from officials of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You have probably heard so much about dehydrated foods since Pearl Harbor that you have come to think of them as something new. But actually this method of processing foods is not new...in fact, it's very old. The Egyptians dried food thousands of years ago. The American Indians were drying corn, meat and fish long before the white man came. Our New England forefathers took a tip from the Indians and dried corn, fruit, and codfish. Drying codfish for export was the first commercial food industry of North America. The soldiers in the Civil War used some dried vegetables. Miners rushing to the Klondike gold strikes carried dried potatoes as a part of their "grub" supply... so did the Great White Fleet in its world cruise after the Spanish War. And during the last World War 9 million pounds of dehydrated foods, mainly potatoes and soup mixtures, went overseas to our forces.

The word "dehydration" is merely another word for drying. Some people call it "drying with a college education", because, as used today, dehydration means drying foods quickly by artificial means to hold their color, flavor, texture and food value as far as possible. Most of the water in the food is lost, of course. Soaking in water is necessary to bring the food back to its fresh state. Dehydrated food will keep for long periods if carefully protected from air and moisture.

You know that almost all foods contain water. Most vegetables and fruits are 85 to 95 percent water. The new ways of dehydrating foods cut this 85 to 95 percent water to as little as 5 percent!

Dehydrated vegetables shrink to about one-sixth their size when fresh. Here is an example. Three crates of raw carrots shrink in dehydration to just enough to fill one 5-gallon can. But this small amount of dried carrot--a 5 gallon canful--will serve nearly 600 soldiers when the carrots have soaked up enough water to bring them back nearly to their original bulk. You can see from this one illustration how useful dehydration is in the war. One ship, or freight car, or plane can do the food-carrying job of 6 when the food is dehydrated...and that sets the other 5 carriers free for other war needs. But dehydration cuts weight even more than bulk--cuts weight to one-tenth of the raw product. This is also an important advantage in wartime, especially in shipping by air.

In addition to saving cargo and storage space, dehydration is making it possible to send abroad many foods that in their fresh state could not stand a long ocean voyage. Our armed forces and fighting allies are getting dehydrated milk, eggs, vegetables, tomato juice, citrus juice, cranberry sauce and even meat. They use 7 dehydrated vegetables most and these are: white and sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, cabbage, and rutabagas. But many other vegetables are successful dehydrated--sweet corn, peas, lima beans, snap beans, spinach and other greens, squash and tomatoes. Some of these may be more important after the war than those now used most, because in this country we can usually get root vegetables throughout the year.

With a few exceptions, you cannot buy dehydrated foods from your grocer at present. But after the war they may be staples, much as flour and sugar are at present. For general cooking uses you may be buying dried eggs and dried milk after the war just as your baker does now. As for the dehydrated vegetables and fruits, those that pass the taste test may continue in use after the war. Dehydrated soups have already proved themselves.

Since American housewives are the ones who will buy and prepare these new

foods, you, of course, want to know what to expect of them. You are probably wondering what they look like, for one thing...also how they compare with fresh food or canned food or frozen food. You probably also want to know how they hold their vitamins and other food values.

Well, dehydrated vegetables, even when dry, look good. Dehydrated carrots are bright red-orange...spinach is a rich green...beets are deep red...sweet corn is creamy yellow. They may come in dried strips...or slices... or pieces, so that, after soaking in water and cooking, they will look as much like fresh cooked vegetables as possible. People have eaten whole meals of dehydrated foods without even suspecting it.

Of course, no processed vegetable is exactly like a fresh vegetable just out of the garden. Even some of the so-called fresh vegetables have been in storage... or in transit...or on the shelves so long before reaching the table that they really are not as fresh as vegetables that were canned, or frozen, or dehydrated right after harvesting. People have learned to like canned vegetables though they seldom confuse them with fresh vegetables. The same thing may come to be true of dehydrated vegetables.

As for the food value of dehydrated foods, the scientists are still checking on this. Results so far show that freshly dehydrated foods contain about the same amount of protein, starch and sugar, and minerals as fresh foods-- and about the same as canned foods. Some of the vitamin value of vegetables and fruits is lost. Proper storage of the dehydrated foods have much to do with how they hold their vitamins.

One of the advantages of dehydrated foods is the saving of bulk and weight for the housewife. Carrying groceries won't be the chore it is now. A dozen dried eggs weigh just 5 ounces...dehydrated potatoes, onions, cabbage and other fruits and vegetables weigh only a fraction as much as the same amount of fresh food. They will save storage space in the kitchen, too.

This gives you a little glimpse of what dried foods -- now doing so much for our armed forces and allies--may do for American housewives after the war.

